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ABSTRACT

Examination of the history of secondary school English elective curricula--from their development and growth between 1962 and 1968, through their refinement and variation between 1968 and 1972, to their critical examination and decline between 1972 and 1977--can be summarized in six points. First, the curriculum was a logical development springing from deep roots in educational history and English teaching (life adjustment education, the Progressive era, and the academic model of English). Second, the elective curriculum provided a springboard from which the English profession could examine and act upon many basic issues in secondary school learning and teaching such as change and variety, relevance, the viability of the core curriculum concept, and student and teacher interests. Third, the elective curriculum gave the teacher and student a powerful impetus for instruction and learning--control. Fourth, it was genuinely innovative in that it restructured the traditional curriculum and also paid serious attention to new subjects related to English. Fifth and sixth, while its decline is the "zeitgeist" of the times, the curriculum will probably influence English teaching in the future. (A case study of the elective program at Fort Hunt High School, Fairfax County, Virginia, is used as an example of the philosophy used in most elective programs and of the development and decline of elective programs.) (RL)

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THE ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, AND DECLINE OF THE SECONDARY ENGLISH ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

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THE ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, AND DECLINE OF THE SECONDARY ENGLISH ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

The following article represents a 350-page dissertation on the history, national development, and ultimate decline of the English elective curriculum in the secondary schools of the nation. The dissertation uses historical research and includes a case study of a high school which followed an elective curriculum for almost fifteen years. Along with secondary research using periodicals, books, speeches, and dissertations, the study also includes primary research of school records, course descriptions, evaluation reports, and fourteen interviews.

The origin of the elective curriculum is found in the Progressive Movement and its belief that the child's interest is the basis for all learning. Thus the curriculum was not simply a shallow fad, a result of the more libertarian decades of the sixties and seventies, but rather the logical outgrowth of a long succession of movements within the field of education in general and the English curriculum in particular.

Generally established in 1962 by G. Robert Carlsen and in 1966 by the APEX program, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum became, almost overnight by most curricular standards, a sensation. Called by some in the field as one of the most significant curricular innovations of the century, it was adopted widely and took on the characteristics of a grass roots movement. Yet, as the curriculum became nationally popular, inherent weaknesses in its conceptual design and especially in its implementation emerged, resulting in intense criticism from educational theorists and English practitioners. These criticisms caused many schools, like the subject of the case study, to abandon the elective program entirely and return to traditional curricula and its 1980's emphasis on competency and the basics.

Yet the elective curriculum, in its success and in its failure, is an important milestone in English curriculum and may, in the future, resurge into national importance.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SECONDARY ENGLISH ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

The Reports of the Committee of Ten and of the Cardinal Principles

The history of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum begins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the debate of whether the purpose of the secondary school was preparation for life or preparation for college. While the 1892 report of the Committee of Ten and the 1918 Cardinal Principles report were concerned with the general state of the American public school, the reports addressed the problem of educational dualism, the practice in the high schools of educating college-bound students in one manner and non-college bound students in another. In the field of English particularly this dualism was deplored, and the report of the Committee of Ten advocated that "the high-school course in English should be identical for students who intend to go to college...and for those who do not,"[1] noting, "There is no good reason why one [class] of students should receive a training in their mother tongue different either in kind or in amount from that received by...other...classes."[2] The Cardinal Principles report reiterated this concern, adding that English instruction should also attend to "studies of direct value"[3] which could "kindle social ideals and give insight into social conditions and personal character."[4] Citing the report of the Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools report (also knows as the "Hosic Report"), the Cardinal Principles stressed that theory and student experience must be related in instruction,[5] not divorced in courses overly concerned with English taught only "as a logically organized science."[6]

The Progressive Movement

The debate continued, and the interest in a preparation for living and the responsibility of the secondary school to relate to experience became, in English and in other subjects, a predominant concern for early twentieth century educators. It also became a major tenet of the amorphous and encompassing philosophy called the Progressive Movement, represented by the Progressive Education Association. Founded in 1919, the PEA stressed the same ideas as the Committee of Ten and the Cardinal Principles, the education of children not in relation to college preparation but in relation to the child's interest in the world. Progressives felt that education should concern itself not with a traditional and idealized, however well-planned, core curriculum which would be mastered by all students, but with the real needs of the students themselves. These needs would be met through an experience curriculum articulated largely through themes,[7] units, and projects. As the 1935 Experience Curriculum stated, "the ideal curriculum consists of well-selected experiences."[8] By meeting students' interests in a realistic curriculum, enthusiasm should be generated, and the child would therefore have a far better preparation for life itself; as Martin Mayer notes in The Schools, "the child learned, in progressive theory, by satisfying his innate curiosity about a reality presented to him."[9] And, as the results of the Eight Year Study indicated, students prepared in this manner fared as well as their traditionally prepared counterparts.[10]

Yet the laudable aim of relating the classroom to the real needs of students developed into what was called, innocuously enough, life adjustment education, a movement which, despite its good intentions and possibly because of its extremism, precipitated a rejection of progressive ideals in the schools.

Life Adjustment Education

In 1929, resonant of the reports of the Committee of Ten and of the Cardinal Principles, a vocational educator Charles A. Prosser wrote that schools should be

"integrated with life so that learners utilize in school the experiences they get outside of school and apply outside of school what they learn in school."[11] Later, in 1945, Prosser proposed an actual curriculum for the secondary schools, a curriculum which would provide what he called "the life adjustment training [students] need and to which they are entitled as American citizens."[12] Certainly the Cardinal Principles report, with its emphasis on "a social and practical basis for the high-school curriculum"[13] seemed a logical precedent for life adjustment. Unfortunately, however, life adjustment education never fully defined itself and, in English, degenerated into isolated instruction on students' adjustment "needs:" for example, a United States Office of Education bulletin on life adjustment suggested that the English classroom cooperate in units involving "psychology of group living," "human relations," "choosing a mate," "approaching marriage," and "housing the family," to mention a few.[14] The suggested units were obviously not traditional ones and not ones which many would associate with the traditional English classroom. As a result, historian Lawrence Cremin notes, life adjustment education achieved a special "notoriety,"[15] and critics claimed it harmed academic standards rather than providing for genuine student needs.[16]

Widely discredited even before the educational upheaval of 1957, life adjustment education was villified by many who, in post-World War II America, feared a decline in the quality of the nation's education. Mortimer Smith in his 1949 And Madly Teach railed against current instructional practices, and Albert Lynd, in the 1950 Quackery in the Public Schools, claimed the public schools were in a "mess."[17] Arthur Bestor in 1953 saw only Educational Wastelands, and in 1955 Rudolph Flesch fumed regarding Why Johnny Can't Read.

The critics were influential and, according to educator Dan Donlan, 'A new concept of English--as intellectual excellence--was forming."[18] Thus, when the Commission on English Instruction asked in 1956 that literature be studied for thematic interests and not as a "means of social adjustment,"[19] the time had

clearly arrived for a shift in emphasis and what educational historian Arthur N. Applebee calls the "academic model."[20]

The Academic Model

After the launching of Sputnik and the increased national concern regarding America's stature in the world, the critics of life adjustment education and of progressive ideals in education intensified their attacks on the secondary schools. To complicate matters, discredited as being inherently useful to the nation, as making "little contribution...to a scientific age,"[21] English was pointedly excluded from the 1958 National Defense Education Act, and many in the profession felt that the only intelligent response would be for English to join the sciences and math in their claim to intellectual--and national defense--importance. This, of course, gave added impetus to the change in curricular goals away from the adjustment/affective concerns of language arts instruction and towards the more purely cognitive. Two significant events of this time, related to this shift, were the 1958 Basic Issues Conference, which stated English was, like the sciences, a "'discipline'" and possessed of a sequential nature,[22] and the 1959 Woods Hole Conference. The latter, summarized in Jerome Bruner's The Process of Education, proclaimed the spiral curriculum, the "New English,"[23] and a "revival of concern for the quality and intellectual aims of education."[24]

In the secondary English curriculum, the units on family living and social correspondence disappeared, and literary classics, grammar, and formal writing replaced them. Some college level work was "moved down to the high school level, and those once taught in high school were pushed down to the junior high school."[25] In addition, tracking, for the first time in recent history, was also reinstated.[26] A concern for the gifted, a strengthening of the Advanced Placement program, and the possibility of "'teacher proof' curricula"[27] were hallmarks of the time.

English as tripod, as subject matter, as intellectual discipline, as mental rigor, became, within the academic model, the definition of the field. It was an

attractive concept for beleaguered and possibly insecure teachers who had jumped onto the progressive and life adjustment bandwagons. Yet, the academic model placed extraordinary demands upon non-college-bound students, was somewhat elitist through its academic segregation of students, and, as Applebee notes, was moderately rigid:

> When it came time to modify the curriculum for the less able, however--a process that was really neglected for most of the sixties--it would take radical reform rather than simple modification to produce a viable structure.[28]

Reaction and Liberalism

The demise of the academic model was related to the zeitgeist of the times and tied to a panoply of forces: the establishment of the New Left, the Civil Rights Movement, the influx of federal money--and guidelines--in the schools,[29] and the Youth Movement. Regarding the latter, as Jim Heath writes in Decade of Disillusionment, many of the young in the mid-sixties felt that "knowledge, scientific inquiry, and disciplined training were of little value; what was important was to experience and to feel."[30] Similarly, Kenneth Keniston, in his Young Radicals, notes that many of the young "decided that classroom work was largely irrelevant to their real education. [There was an] emerging ambivalence toward the 'merely academic.'"[31] This disaffection with traditional schooling was underscored by the "romantic" critics of the period, Paul Goodman, Jonathan Kozol, Nat Hentoff, John Holt, and others, who wrote works strongly critical of the public schools. Their beliefs were echoed by the 1968 Committee for Economic Development, which called for a "major revolution in the objectives, methods, and organization of the schools."[32] Finally, another potent factor in the school was the new role of the teacher; for the first time and in great numbers, teachers demanded a share of influence. Adele Stern writes that teachers "were declaring: We want to determine what we teach. We don't want publishers telling us. We don't want mandated curriculum from some central office."[33] Certainly teaching

in the academic model had not been an easy experience for many, and instructor Rosanne Soffer's dry comment was indicative of many teacher's feelings: "any teacher who has ever sat in a classroom with nothing between him and a group of bottom level swingers but an anthology of English literature doesn't have to be told the dimensions of hell."[34]

What Martin Mayer called the "masterpiece mentality"[35] in English was now perceived as not applicable to all students. The result was a new movement in the schools:

> Educational reformers, appalled by the persistence of poverty and racial injustice in America [called] attention to a very different kind of neglect--the neglect of the vast numbers of young people effectively excluded from the job market unless they had high school diplomas, yet offered little in the way of meaningful education while they waited out their twelve-year confinement.[36]

Thus in the middle sixties a response to the academic model was formulating. The 1965 report of an NCTE-sponsored Task Force on Teaching English to the Disadvantaged found a "slavish adherence to inappropriate courses of study"[37] and encouraged a shift from purely academic concerns. More significantly, the 1966 Anglo American Conference at Dartmouth addressed the "human values"[38] of English and suggested students be involved in curriculum planning and that courses be established to open new options in English.[39] An "experience-based curriculum,"[40] which harks back to the progressives and life adjustment, was a focus of the Dartmouth Conference, and academic tracking was rejected.[41] Cremin's "strangely pertinent"[42] and progressive movement had returned. As Applebee notes:

> Men who once led the attack on the progressives shifted their ground, now attacking the dehumanization of the school that seemed to have accompanied the academic approach...This shift of values has led to its own period of experiment in the teaching of English...it is not surprising to find that many of the experiments being offered [now in 1974] are variations upon methods that were central to progressive pedagogy.[43]

And one of those experiments, while not the only innovation to follow the academic model, but surely one of the most visible and popular, was the

Secondary English Elective Curriculum. The curriculum, in the late sixties and in the early seventies, expanded across the nation, becoming somewhat of a grass roots movement. The implementation of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum differed from most other curricular movements in that it did not first emerge in theoretical discussions and then slowly, cautiously, enter the schools in practice. Indeed, the curriculum was adopted, often aggressively, by classroom teachers and departmental chairpersons who perceived it as an accessible, workable model for their schools. The curriculum was, in many ways, appealing: it gave the classroom teacher control over the curriculum; it directly addressed the student and his or her stake in the learning process; it reflected the real world in the classroom, using, as it did, popular culture and the influence of the media as legitimate subjects of study; and, finally, the curriculum was an exciting, intensely individual venture. The Secondary English Elective Curriculum was perceived as a welcome change from the academic model and, in many ways, it reflected the best of the progressive ideal, that the child's interest was the legitimate base for learning.

Precedents for the Secondary English Elective Curriculum

The idea of being able to choose one's own courses was not a new one. In his 1869 inaugural address, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot proposed that electives be open to students after their freshman year.[44] In a later 1892 speech, Eliot broadened his statement to contend that any secondary education without such "options"[45] would fail to broaden the mind. Accordingly, Eliot wanted to introduce electives at the fifth grade level, with the goal of an almost totally elective program for the fifteen year-old student.[46]

In the public schools, there was historical precedent for providing, under the umbrella of general electives for secondary students, non-required semester or year courses in aspects of English not ordinarily covered in the traditional year-long English course. A 1913 English Journal article mentions such a course

in journalism,[47] and a 1915 article describes an "alternative" English course.[48] Franklin Bobbitt's 1924 How to Make a Curriculum cites English electives of literary writing, dramatics, public speaking, and history of the English language as possibilities.[49] Thus the concept of electives is not new, although an entire curriculum based on electives is.

The Founding of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum

While undisputed credit for the founding of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum is not easily established--Harvey Overton published a 1955 article on electives[50] and Dr. Vernon Smith writes of a 1958 elective program[51]--the 1962 English Journal article by G. Robert Carlsen received national attention and was the acknowledged basis for many subsequent elective programs. As George Hillocks states, Carlsen's elective program became a "prototype"[52] for others, and thus he is, most probably, the "founder" of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum. At the laboratory school of the University of Iowa, Carlsen established the hallmark of the elective program: student choice of short, self-contained courses.

Concerned, like many in the period of the academic model, that students were not being individualized sufficiently and, further, that they were disaffected in school, Carlsen offered to junior and senior students a variety of English courses which were not merely divisions of an older curriculum chopped into semester segments. Carlsen's elective program was predominantly literature-oriented, and other elective programs would follow that pattern. In addition, Carlsen pioneered the nongraded, or age-mixed classes, allowing students of different classes in school to mingle in their chosen courses. Finally, Carlsen, with some restriction on the distribution of the courses, did not sequence his electives so that students would take any one course before another. This also became a hallmark of many elective programs to follow and reflected a philosophy that not only was a irreductible core curriculum spurious in the field of English but that language arts, by their very nature, did not follow a definable sequence of study.

Although Carlsen's 1962 article discussed the formation and implementation of one elective curriculum and had considerable impact, the single most powerful force in the dissemination of information regarding the structure and formulation of elective programs was provided through the 1966 federally funded Project APEX from Trenton, Michigan. This project, and the study which detailed it, was elaborate, complex, and widely publicized. It served as a pattern for many high school English departments, and the Trenton High School principal Neil Van Riper estimated that the APEX program was adopted by "as many as 500 schools" in the nation.[53] After dissemination of APEX, the elective curriculum exploded in popularity, becoming, by 1970, what educator John Crabbe called "a national stampede."[54]

Significantly, APEX added a fourth characteristic to the Secondary English Elective Curriculum. While Carlsen's initial Iowa program had featured student choice, a nongraded arrangement of courses, and a lack of sequence, through APEX the concept of phasing, or indicating the level of course difficulty, became a fourth and fairly constant characteristic of elective curricula. Essentially, these features, electing, nongrading, nonsequencing, and phasing, were the definitive characteristics of the curriculum, although a program could be a genuinely elective curriculum if it only allowed student choice.

THE DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF THE SECONDARY ENGLISH ELECTIVE CURRICULUM

The development of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum can be traced from the 1962 Carlsen article to about 1977, when the curriculum began its serious decline in popularity. These 15 years can be logically divided into three stages, one of development and growth (1962-68), refinement and variation (1968-72), and critical examination (1972-77). These divisions are based upon a study of frequency and content of articles and books published regarding the Secondary English Elective Curriculum.

Development and Growth (1962-68)

From about 1962 to 1968, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum shaped itself into a defined curriculum. This period incorporated not only a few small small-scale elective curricula but also the sophisticated APEX program cited before, and the first professional recognition of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum in James Squire and Roger Applebee's 1968 High School English Instruction Today. The word was spreading about the feasibility and operation of elective curricula, and schools across the nation were initiating programs. Squire and Applebee noted a few of the characteristics of elective curricula, the emphasis on "the importance of student interests more than the integrity of subject matter,"[55] "the assumption that young people will group themselves in accordance with their unique needs,"[56] "the implicit assumptions that all subject matter in English is equal in value, that no sequence or pattern in study is desirable,"[57] and that the curriculum generated "important excitement and interest" in the schools.[58]

Refinement and Variation (1968-72)

From about 1968 to 1972, educational journals, especially The English Journal, were replete with articles about the creation of elective curricula. The excitement regarding the curricular innovation seemed to be infectious, and schools all over the nation, modelling themselves upon older programs or relying upon their staff's creativity and resourcefulness, implemented versions of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum. While many programs simply incorporated what was becoming the standard features of the curriculum--electing, nongrading, non-sequencing, and phasing--other schools began to vary upon the elective theme, including modular scheduling, team teaching, more elaborate phasing, sequencing of some elective courses, use of instructors outside the English program, and other additions and innovations. The variations and experiments were almost

endless, and in some cases were creative refinements upon the original elective concept. In other cases, however, experimental elective programs seemed to decrease explicit control of the curriculum, leaving the factor of student choice, electing, as the predominant curricular characteristic and often sacrificing other curricular features of restraint to this overriding concern for student choice. The unsurprising result was often chaos and dissatisfaction, leading the Secondary English Elective Curriculum to a third period of critical examination.

Critical Examination (1972-77)

Nineteen seventy-two was a crucial year for the Secondary English Elective Curriculum because not only did elective programs continue to proliferate, but, finally, a definitive study of the state of the art was offered by George Hillocks, educator and APEX evaluator and consultant. Hillocks' Alternatives in English: A Critical Appraisal of Elective Programs was a landmark work devoted to the elective curriculum. It considered seventy-six schools and school systems in thirty-seven states. Hillocks took a hard look at the many elective programs in the country and found the elective curriculum a flawed one. With the publication of Alternatives, it became clear that some elective programs were faltering under burdens of poor conceptualization and/or implementation, that the curricular innovation was becoming in some cases the established curriculum, and finally that the spirit of excitement was waning due to familiarity. Around 1972, the honeymoon with the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was generally over. Although many educators were still reporting initial forays into elective curricula and were enthusiastic about the results, articles generally reflected a more cautious or, in some instances, hostile tone.

As the 1968 Squire and Applebee High School English Instruction Today was crucial in acknowledging--and thus legitimizing--elective programs, equally significant to the development of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was

the update to Instruction, Arthur N. Applebee's A Survey of Teaching Conditions in English, 1977. Like its sister volume and like Hillocks' Alternatives, A Survey not only assessed the popularity of the elective curricula but also indicated some of its serious deficiencies. While 78% of those who responded to Applebee's survey had some form of an elective program in their schools,[59] Applebee found:

> The general impression...is that most schools are entering a phase of reconceptualizing their elective curriculum imposing somewhat more order--and constraints--upon it. A few schools in the survey had abandoned or were abandoning electives, but for most it was a matter of weeding out unsuccessful courses, providing a better system of guidance for students, and adding new courses in response to the back-to-the-basics movement and minimal competency requirements.[60]

The critical wave regarding elective curricula escalated in the late 1970's. One small but telling indication of the decline of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was found in The English Journal and its articles over a four-year period. In 1976, the Journal featured eleven articles on elective programs and courses; in 1977 it carried a single article on the elective curriculum; in 1978 there were no articles on electives, and the category was removed from the Journal's subject index titles. In 1979, when The English Journal called for manuscripts for its September issue of "English Since Sputnik," a single article was submitted dealing with the elective curriculum. From feast to famine, elective curricula were declining from their very high place in curricular popularity.

Philosophy and Characteristics of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum

While critics of the elective curriculum insisted one of its major problems was its lack of rationale, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum did adhere to a four-part philosophy, a philosophy which, in turn, determined the thirteen central structural and content characteristics of the curriculum as it developed in the late 1960's and 1970's in the nation's high schools (see Figure One). The Secondary English Elective Curriculum's practitioners were remarkable in their general adherence to the four basic tenets, and they guided program developers--albeit occasionally unconsciously--in their work.

PHILOSOPHY

	A. Philosophy of Interest	B. Philosophy of Change and Variety	C. Philosophy of Rejecting the Core Curriculum	D. Philosophy of Relevance
RESULTING STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS	1. Students, with some restrictions in some programs, were free to choose English courses. 2. Teachers, with some restrictions in some programs, created their own courses. 3. Elective courses were nongraded, usually within two grades, sometimes within more. 4. Elective courses were occasionally phased to indicate level of difficulty. 5. Student election and teacher creation determined courses offered and longevity of courses.	1. Elective courses were short or shorter than traditional program courses, ranging from one semester to a period of a few weeks. 2. Students experienced a variety of teachers, and teachers experienced different groups of students in elective courses.	1. Elective courses were not necessarily sequenced by content or level.	(see A., Philosophy of Interest, structural characteristic number one)
RESULTING CONTENT CHARACTERISTICS	6. Elective courses were predominantly literature-oriented	3. Many elective curricula used a college model for courses and programs. 4. Elective courses used more paperback books and assorted materials rather than anthologies and hard-bound texts.	2. Elective courses were rarely required.	1. Elective courses in innovative areas, such as film and media, were offered.

Figure One

Summary Chart of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum

Philosophy and Resulting Characteristics

Philosophy of Interest

The first and most important of the curriculum's philosophical bases was that of interest. Faced with apathetic students--and often teachers--in traditional English programs and courses, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was committed to the ideal that if one were interested in a course of studies or instruction, then learning and teaching would be markedly improved.

Student Choice

One way to create interest was to provide choice. When a student was allowed to determine what he or she would learn or teach, then there was a better chance that the person would have a more immediate stake in the instructional process and an established enthusiasm for the subject. With choice, the major characteristic of any elective curriculum, interest was a more attainable goal. Thus, from the philosophy of interest as a basic and vital curriculum goal, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum emerged with student choice as regards English courses and teacher autonomy as regards course creation and course content. While total choice in the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was an illusion--student choice could be restricted by age, the completion of required courses, or the passing of a basic skills course in some programs, and teachers could be pressed into service to create courses in various areas--the limited choice provided teachers and students in the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was wider than that offered by the traditional curriculum.

The concept of student choice was a central one in the elective curriculum and, essentially distinguished it from other curricular forms. Electives seemed more democratic in that they gave students, all students, a choice about their studies. It was a choice which seemed to underscore a concept of fairness and a choice which would provide students a greater interest in the English curriculum.

Teacher Creation of Courses

Along with student choice, one of the most significant factors in the Secondary English Elective Curriculum's widespread adoption was its recognition of the interest of the English teacher in what he or she would teach. While, ten or so years before, theorists had told teachers what to teach and had even recommended the establishment of "teacher-proof" curricula, the English teachers in an elective program had greater control over what they could teach, and it was a control which journal articles of the time indicated was welcomed.

Nongrading

A third characteristic to emerge from the philosophy of interest was the concept of nongrading within a curriculum. Because a student was interested in a course and chose it, rigid age distinctions which had previously governed the composition of English courses seemed far less important than they once had: Secondary English Elective proponents felt that students separated by a few years in age could mix freely and successfully in a single class because distinctions between intellectual maturity were far less important than the motivating factor of interest.

Phasing

Yet, as a fourth characteristic, some curricular proponents who were unsure of the effects of completely nongraded courses whose difficulty level might frustrate an otherwise interested student, provided phasing, a numerical designation given each elective course to indicate subject difficulty. While a particularly phased course could have students of different ages within it, the phasing provided students an index of course level.

Longevity of Courses

A fifth characteristic which stemmed from the philosophy of interest was the possibility of allowing students and teachers to determine not only the courses offered but the longevity of the offered courses. If there was no interest in a

specific subject area--evidenced by teacher failure to create a course or student failure to subscribe to an offered course--then that subject area would be eliminated or dropped from the curriculum. Because interest was the overriding concern, artificial creation or maintenance of a specific course was considered untenable.

Literature Emphasis

A sixth characteristic of the interest philosophy was the literary dominance of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum, reflecting the interest of the teacher-creators and also, to a lesser extent, of the students. Teachers, trained as English majors in literature-dominated college curricula and students, electing literature courses more frequently (whatever the complicated reasons) than other courses, made literature the backbone of most elective programs.

Philosophy of Change and Variety

A second philosophical concern of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was the importance of change and variety within the curriculum. Concerned that in the traditional program students and one teacher spent an entire year together with a small pool of texts from which to work, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum encouraged students and teachers to experience more varied subject matter, groupings, and materials.

Short Elective Courses

Thus one characteristic of the curriculum to emerge from the philosophy of change and variety was the offering of short or shorter courses than traditional programs. These short courses ranged from one semester to a period of a few weeks. This length of time allowed students to change teachers and teachers to change classes of students.

Variety of Teachers and Students

The above gave rise to a second characteristic, the students' experience of a variety of teachers and the teachers' experience of different groups of students in the elective curriculum.

College Model

As a third characteristic to emerge from the philosophy of change and variety, most Secondary English Elective Curricula used a college model, creating a curriculum which offered short, essentially unrelated, unsequenced English courses taught by a variety of instructors.

Varied Materials

A fourth characteristic of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was that it veered away from the dominance of anthologies and hardbound texts and used a stunning array of paperbacks and other materials to provide curricular variety and to enrich subject matter.

Philosophy Rejecting the Core Curriculum

As Carlsen and others have indicated, a third philosophical concern of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was the rejection of the core curriculum. Proponents of elective programs did not maintain that certain pieces of literature or exposure to certain skills was essential to the English education of all secondary students and also that a specific sequencing of literature--or of any series of skills--was essential.

No Sequencing

As a result, one characteristic of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was the failure to sequence courses or levels of instruction as had the traditional curriculum. As with the characteristic of the college model, one could not dictate that a student should experience X before Y or vice versa.

No Curricular Requirements

In some cases, this philosophy dictated the second characteristic stemming from the rejection of the core curriculum, the absence of curricular requirements. Because there was no core curriculum, one could not state with authority that every student should have a specific course or group of courses within his or her secondary experience. Imbedded in these two characteristics, the failure to

sequence and the failure to require, was the concept that skills in the areas of language, writing, and literature were contained in almost all forms of English curriculum and were not necessarily transmitted in any specific course. While some might assume this belief in the inclusiveness of English to be an inherently optimistic point of view, it was another cogent rationale for the rejection of the core curriculum: not only were there no sacred works or sequence of study, English itself as a subject was so interrelated that most of the skills and essential concepts were embedded in almost all areas of study.

Philosophy of Relevance

Innovative Courses

A fourth philosophical tenet of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was a dedication to relevance. Feeling that many traditional curricula, especially in a devotion to the "classics," ignored current literature and areas of study, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum included innovative courses such as film and media and also encouraged the reading of very contemporary literature. In addition, some elective programs included new forms of language study. Faced with students who could see no connection between the traditional English courses and their exploding world, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum attempted to provide as many au courant offerings as possible. Perhaps their very belief that English was relevant, was related to the real world as even students might define it, allowed elective creators, with some confidence, to abandon Silas Marner and Shakespeare for Marshall McLuhan and filmmaking.

Thus, despite its occasional failure in articulation, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum adhered to four major philosophical beliefs and from these four philosophical tenets sprang thirteen characteristics, one of which, student choice, was indigenous to all elective programs. The characteristics relate logically to either the curriculum's content or structure and, again, the reader is referred to Figure One.

Critical Assessments of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum

The Secondary English Elective Curriculum experienced serious criticism beginning with the decade of the seventies, and periodicals began to feature with increasing regularity not only articles about elective curricula and their formation and content but also articles discussing the relative merits and demerits of the elective program as it was currently functioning in the secondary schools of the nation. Some of these articles adopted arguments which reached back to the academic model; others examined specific elective curricula and attacked their demonstrable weaknesses.

There are, in general, eleven major criticisms of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum, and they can be divided into four major groups (see Figure Two). The first group assailed the curriculum for flaws which are inherent in most curricula and systems of teaching, elective or otherwise (i.e., insufficient evaluation and little individualization). The second group attacked the curriculum for flaws which are indigenous to the teaching of English and all that difficult enterprise entails (i.e., lack of sequence, dominance of literature in the curriculum). The third group attacked the Secondary English Elective Curriculum for its own philosophical base, including the criticism that it had no rationale or philosophy (a contention which has been refuted), that student choice was illusory, that courses were not of sufficient length, and that there were not sufficient required courses in the curriculum to insure that students had a mastery of basic skills and a common learning experience. The fourth group, probably the most cogent, attacked the curriculum for flaws in its implementation, specifically, teachers' inability, given time and material constraints, to create useful courses, problems in scheduling the many elective courses, and course descriptions which were misleading and blatantly pandered to students' interests. Obviously, the first two groups of critics cannot be considered in the same light as the last two for, indeed, the elective curriculum shared with

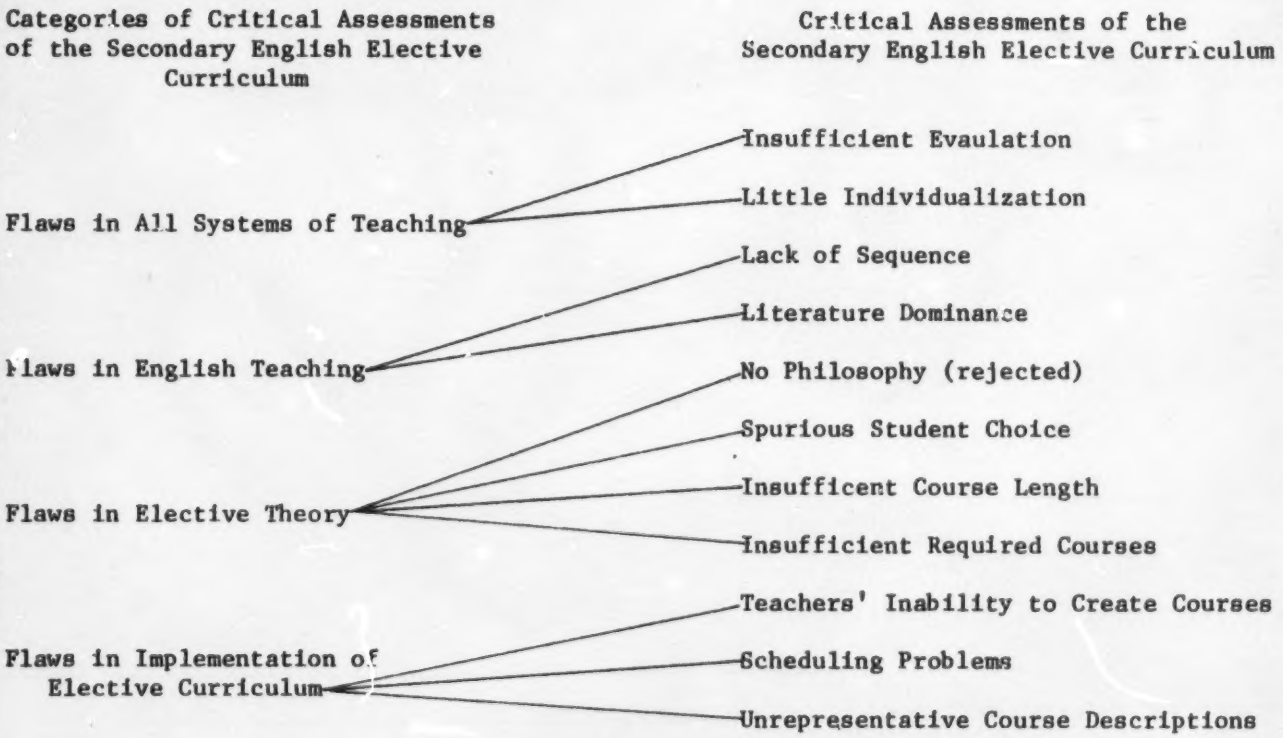
Categories of Critical Assessments of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum
Critical Assessments of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum
Flaws in All Systems of Teaching
Insufficient Evaulation
Little Individualization
Flaws in English Teaching
Lack of Sequence
Literature Dominance
Flaws in Elective Theory
No Philosophy (rejected)
Spurious Student Choice
Insufficent Course Length
Insufficient Required Courses
Flaws in Implementation of Elective Curriculum
Teachers' Inability to Create Courses
Scheduling Problems
Unrepresentative Course Descriptions

Figure Two

Critical Categories and Assessments of the

Secondary English Elective Curriculum

traditional curricula and with the entire English teaching profession many shortcomings and problems. The last two groups, however, were formidable in their attack upon the innovative curriculum as failing not only in its philosophical base but in its ability effectively to implement that philosophy.

Assessing the criticisms of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum, perhaps a theoretical consideration of the disparity between the real and the ideal is in order. Surely elective proponents were enthusiastic, perhaps understandably so, especially in relation to the kind of response they elicited from their students and their colleagues working in the program. In its first flush of enthusiasm, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum often postulated itself as an unequivocal improvement over the general curriculum and the traditional English program. In fact, the Secondary English Elective Curriculum was more of an alternative to traditional programs and an attempt to meet some, but not all, of the deficiencies of the traditional program. That the elective curriculum could not answer some of the perennial questions of traditional English curricula was evident. And, indeed, a failing of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum's proponents seemed to be that their enthusiasm implied that the new program was, without qualification, an improvement over all other curricular forms, English or otherwise. Critics charged that an advance in one area did not solve all other areas of instructional concern and that a change in approach or structure, in addition, did not necessarily indicate an advance. Yet, on the other hand, the first group of critics of the elective program could often do little but offer vague exhortations for change; in no case in available literature was a fully conceived alternative curriculum postulated as answer to the elective program. Some of the problems of elective curricula had plagued English since its inception as a separate entity in the secondary curriculum. It would seem unrealistic, therefore, to expect the new curricular form magically to answer dilemmas which had been debated for many years previously and, to date, remain largely unsolved.

The second group of critics, however, were of a different sort. They directly assailed the curriculum for its demonstrable--although, as previously indicated, sometimes unarticulated--philosophical base and addressed the essential questions of English curricula and instruction. As the curriculum became more widespread, critics began looking at problems of course length and creation and variety, of student choice, of the restriction of the curriculum to a few grade levels or to all grade levels, of record keeping and scheduling, of students' basic skills instruction, and of course descriptions which often resembled trendy advertising directed to students now transformed into consumers.

As the months and years progressed, some schools attempted to meet these problems and questions by changing aspects of their curriculum; others, under the burden of increasing pressure, escalating with the competency and basics movements, chose drastically either to modify their program or to abolish it entirely. Indeed the Secondary English Elective Curriculum could not claim total success, either due to flaws in theory or implementation, but neither could it be entirely rejected because of partial failure. As Hillocks pointed out, the days were past when the teacher in the English classroom was seen as "simply a technician pushing...students through a pre-existent curriculum."[61] Hillocks proclaimed, perhaps grandly, that "elective programs probably represent the most significant development in school English curricula in the twentieth century"[62] and that, through the curriculum, "the shackles of the conventional program have been thrown off."[63] Whether, of course, they will be put back on is part of the future of the English curriculum and is a history which is still in the making.

The Case Study: Fort Hunt High School

The subject of the case study was the elective program of Fort Hunt High School, a suburban school of about 2,000 students located in Fairfax County, Virginia. The school opened in the fall of 1963, initiated a pilot elective program in 1965-66 and discontinued the program at the end of 1977-78. Through

interviews of all five departmental chairmen, four English teachers, two administrators, and the course descriptions and evaluation reports for the fifteen-year period, it is clear that the course of the Secondary English Elective Curriculum did not run very smoothly at Fort Hunt. Racked with internal disagreement, tension between staff and administration, parental criticism, and simply lack of energy to further alter the curriculum to everyone's satisfaction, the Fort Hunt program, while a strong and well-conceptualized venture, could not justify itself in its later years. While no attempt can be made to universalize the experience of Fort Hunt, the case study does provide a detailed and valuable example of the experience of one school.

The Fort Hunt program has links to G. Robert Carlsen through a 1962 speech he made in Virginia and through a departmental chairperson who was a student of Carlsen's at the University of Texas. While the original English program was a traditional one with year-long courses, one grammar and one literature text per course, and a three-part ability level tracking program, some members of the English department, concerned with the less academically able students among the predominantly white, affluent student body, were interested in experimenting with a new curriculum.

After a pilot program which involved only junior and senior English students, in 1968-69, the Fort Hunt elective program, over the protests of many English teachers, was opened to include ninth and tenth graders. These two levels were nongraded among themselves, as were the eleventh and twelfth graders. Thus beginning with 1968-69 and under three departmental chairpersons, the Fort Hunt High School elective program underwent a number of adaptations and modifications. The adaptations were largely of the structural, not of the content, variety, as the content of the literature-dominated elective courses remained fairly stable over the ten-year period ending in 1977-78. In general, the program became more formal and initiated more sophisticated methods of student selection and

course description. In addition, the initiation in 1974-75 of a system-wide course of study by Fairfax County also forced the elective program to redefine itself and to include, not only required courses, but, in the individual elective courses, instruction related to composition and grammar skills.

As evidenced by the extensive modification which it underwent, the Fort Hunt program was under pressure from its affluent parents and predominantly college-bound students to improve and refine the elective program. The change in structure was largely a reflection upon the curriculum's attempt to provide skills in grammar and composition and thus insure that all students were receiving appropriate skills instruction.

The Fort Hunt High School elective program certainly subscribed to the four-part philosophy which has been explored previously, believing that interest was a major factor in student contentment with the curriculum, that change and variety was essential, and that the core curriculum was not a viable concept, and that relevance was of major importance.

Characteristics of the Fort Hunt Program

The Fort Hunt program shared many of thirteen characteristics of most elective programs in the nation with the exceptions of phasing and sequencing. The program was not genuinely sequenced, except by age level, and there was no phase level indication of courses. Certain classes, however, such as those in individualized reading, grammar review, and a discussion course called "Rap-In" were geared to students with specific needs.

Condensing mightily, it might be said that the Fort Hunt program allowed students, with some restrictions, free choice of classes and gave its teachers total control over the creation of courses. The courses were nongraded, and student election determined the longevity of courses although, at Fort Hunt, the courses over the years seem fairly stable.

Using a college model, despite some innovations (see Figure Three for a

summary), the Fort Hunt elective courses were predominantly literature oriented and ranged from a six-week to a nine-week length. Hard bound anthologies did not seem to be staple material, and paperback texts, films, and workbooks were used in many courses.

Although courses were often chosen on the basis of instructor rather than on content, students were free to choose whatever they wished.

The Fort Hunt program did require a beginning skills course, later changed into skills or "base" days and later "base" units.

Criticisms of the Fort Hunt Program

Looking at the eleven criticisms of elective programs, Fort Hunt was generally a sound program and avoided some of the pitfalls of others across the nation. The program did, however, have some weaknesses.

The Fort Hunt elective program did not have a problem with evaluation; from its pilot program in 1965-66 to its last year in 1977-78, the elective program was in a continuous state of assessment. Teachers and departmental chairpersons observed the program carefully and changed its components accordingly. Further, evaluative instruments administered over the years indicate that students were performing well on basic skills tests and that Advanced Placement scores were steady at least over a five year period from 1967-68 to 1971-72.

Individualization, however, seemed to be a significant problem at Fort Hunt, and one of the major contentions cited by those interviewed was the fact that the elective program did not offer sufficient alternatives to those who were less academically able. This concern, mentioned as a reason for the creation of the initial elective program at Fort Hunt, remained a serious dilemma.

With Fort Hunt's consistent experimentation with writing and grammar skills designations and requirements, the Fort Hunt program did attempt to provide a sequence of skills. Nevertheless, within the literature dominated electives, no sequence was provided. In addition, examining the records of elective course

COURSE DESIGNATION	1965-66 (11 & 12)	1966-67 and 1967-68 (11 & 12)	1968-69 (9 & 10)	1968-69 (11 & 12)	1969-70 (9 & 10)	1969-70 (11 & 12)	1970-71 (9 & 10)	1970-71 (11 & 12)	1971-72 (9 & 10)	1971-72 (11 & 12)	1972-73 (9 & 10)	1972-73 (11 & 12)	1973-74 (9 & 10)	1973-74 (11 & 12)	1974-75 (9-12)	Post 1974-75 (9-12)
Thematic Literature	12%	59%	59%	62%	58%	47%	52%	61%	53%	41%	51%	42%	56%	33%	9%	19%
Generic Literature	29%	28%	31%	26%	23%	31%	16%	11%	18%	32%	24%	42%	25%	37%	55%	58%
Survey Literature	29%	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	8%
Total Literature	70%	89%	90%	88%	83%	78%	68%	72%	71%	75%	75%	84%	81%	70%	65%	85%
Language	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Composition	0%	0%	1.5%	2%	2%	0%	10%	9%	10%	10%	10%	8%	0%	11%	4%	4%
Speech	0%	1%	0%	2%	4%	4%	2%	1.5%	5%	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	4%	8%
Theatre and Drama	12%	2%	1.5%	2%	2%	4%	8%	6%	6%	8%	2%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%
Grammar	12%	1%	0%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1.5%	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Media	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	2%	3%	6%	3%	2%	4%	4%	6%	0%	3%	4%
Reading	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	4%	2%	1.5%	2%	2%	2%	0%	6%	11%	3%	0%
Miscellaneous	6%	5%	7%	4%	2%	6%	3%	3%	2%	2%	4%	0%	3%	7%	15%	0%
Total Number of Courses	17	87	59 53 112		48 51 99		61 66 127		62 59 121		49 48 97		32 27 59*		67	26

*Data Incomplete: second quarter courses missing for 11 and 12

Figure Three

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS OF FORT HUNT HIGH SCHOOL ELECTIVE COURSES

By Course Designation and Year

descriptions for ninth and tenth graders and eleventh and twelfth graders, there was no apparent difference between the difficulty levels of the courses.

Spurious student choice certainly related to the concept of individualization and, at Fort Hunt, was a problem. Indeed, for many years of the Fort Hunt elective program, students were able to choose only from a literature-dominated curriculum, although there were, in the program's defense, courses offered in speech, theatre and drama, media, and reading. Finally, many interviewees noted that, in the later years of the program, students were choosing courses more on the basis of the instructor than on course content.

The Fort Hunt elective curriculum lengthened elective courses from six to nine weeks in 1973-74, and the English department was sensitive to the criticism regarding short courses; insufficient course length thus did not appear to be a concern at Fort Hunt. In addition, as the Fort Hunt program had required a skills course from 1966-67 to the end of the program, insufficient required courses were not a problem. Scheduling dilemmas, while mentioned, did not seem overriding; the Fort Hunt administration was exceptionally cooperative with the program, even, at one point, allowing the elective courses to be shorter than the general school's marking period.

While teachers at Fort Hunt were not given released time to create courses, and at one point in the program, were writing new courses weeks before those courses would be offered to students, teachers seemed capable of creating useful, solid courses. Student election of courses, however, seemed to be an irritant, and there was some evidence of interdepartmental rivalry regarding the popularity of elective courses. Possibly a result of this rivalry was an increasing effort, in the later years of the program, to publish course descriptions which seemed to err on the side of flamboyance. As the program progressed, catchier titles were used with some some blatant appeals to student interests and insecurities.

Guided by enthusiastic chairpersons and generally staffed by competent teachers, the Fort Hunt elective program certainly had ingredients for success. Indeed, the Fort Hunt program seems to have enjoyed a general popularity with students and, from all of the evaluative evidence, also produced competent graduates. Yet the concern with skills development, the need to integrate the Fairfax County Program of Studies with the elective program, and finally the increase from four to five teaching periods simply proved too much. The teachers themselves having experimented and altered and adjusted to the end of their patience, finally determined that the program, as it was then operating, was simply more than a single English department could handle. It was, in some ways, a sad decision, but it was also indicative of the fate of many elective programs across the nation.

Conclusion

What can be concluded about the Secondary English Elective Curriculum can be summarized in six points: the curriculum was, first, a logical development which sprang from deep roots in educational history and English teaching. Second, it provided a springboard for the English profession to examine and act upon many basic issues in secondary learning and teaching. Third, it gave the teacher and student a powerful impetus for instruction and learning, control. Fourth, it was genuinely innovative in that it restructured the traditional curriculum and also paid serious attention to new subjects related to English. Fifth and sixth, while its decline is the zeitgeist of the times, the curriculum will probably influence English teaching in the future.

Was the curriculum truly innovative? It was. By restructuring and recombining the traditional curriculum, by reaching out for new sources of materials in paperback books, film, and popular culture, by offering relatively new subjects of study, by incorporating team teaching, independent study, and interdisciplinary configurations of classes in its short courses, by nongrading,

the curriculum offered an array of options. The curriculum was, simply put, more innovative than traditional curricula; and its spirit was one of experimentation and flexibility.

It is an inescapable reality, as George S. Counts said so well, that "schools, instead of directing the course of change, are themselves driven by the very forces that are transforming the rest of the social order."[64] In the 1980's, schools exist in the midst of a conservative social trend that demands from education survival skills, accountability, a "return" to the "basics," and a general rejection of anything of the classroom which encourages individual control. The halcyon days of experimentation have been replaced by a return of the idea of English as a structured discipline with a core curriculum and with specific skills which must be systematically taught and tested. It should be obvious that the Secondary English Elective Curriculum militates against such quantified learning and teaching and, as the competency/accountability/basics group has increased in strength, those who supported an elective curriculum in almost any form have become silent, turning to the new matters of this more conservative educational decade.

Some schools in the country are, in the 1980's, implementing their first elective ventures, as reported at the Conference on English Education in Omaha, Nebraska; on the other hand, others are modifying theirs in order to incorporate more basic skills and to satisfy demands for competency and accountability. Thus the elective ideal is one which is hard to bury completely. It is in a state of decline. Its apologists are currently silent; but, in the years to come, it will more than likely return in some form and again take importance in English teaching. Occasionally expensive in teacher time, the curriculum can be made manageable with administrative and community support. With proper controls upon implementation, the curriculum can be a vibrant and workable curricular model.

The ideals of interest, relevance, change and variety, and the implicit distrust of a core curriculum in a field as diverse and kaleidoscopic as English are too compelling to be ignored and are ideals which further augment the content and structure of English instruction. The Secondary English Elective Curriculum has performed. It is now in the wings; it may return to the stage in years to come.

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